

# INSUBORDINATION

I Thought We Were Already Bombing Iraq?

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Special Issue

## The Biggest Lie of All

William Blum talks about  
September 11, Iraq and the US Empire

An interview by Hans Bennett

Throughout my many years in college, as well as political involvement off-campus, William Blum's book *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* was a powerful and dependable weapon for unmasking the supposed good will of the US government around the world. As time has passed I continue to find the book on the shelves of the anti-war organizer as well as people who simply want to know the truth about the US role in global politics. Each of the more than 50 chapters is devoted to debunking the official line on a particular intervention since WWII. What makes the book so powerful is its reliable information. In the preface Blum explains that he stayed away from using any information that was not completely credible. With the use of the book, we have in our hands the power to debunk what Bill Clinton our mayor, or college professor has to say about US foreign policy.

Complementing the impeccable sources, is a writing style very clear and easy to understand. Three levels of college classes on postmodernist Marxist theory are not a prerequisite. Furthermore, having been a State Department employee dreaming of being a Foreign Service Officer, he had been successfully brainwashed to believe that the US was a force for good in the world. While his writing is unabashedly passionate and angry as hell, it is written to attract those who are not already awakened to the beast. Originally published by England's Zed Books, it was later reprinted by the US-based Common Courage Press in 1995.

Since *Killing Hope*, Blum has also written *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* and *West Bloc Dissident*. *Rogue State* is sort of a less dense version of *Killing Hope* that focuses more on the general picture of the US empire, versus each particular case. It provides awesome documentation of the Empire's employment of torture, biological and chemical warfare, and other brutal manifestations of state terror in order to maintain global control. *Rogue State* also includes an excellent chapter on the history of CIA drug trafficking dating back to WWII.

*West Bloc Dissident* is an autobiographical work documenting his decision to leave the State Department and to become an organizer and journalist militantly challenging the US ruling class's reign of terror both abroad and at home. The story was particularly interesting to me as someone who did not live during the



**NO WAR:** A family speaks out against war at a rally in Washington, DC shortly after September 11.

late 60s and early 70s. His personal observations of the radical scene in both Washington DC and the San Francisco Bay Area were very interesting as well as documenting how many of the most radical later sold out to a really upsetting degree. Blum also spent a year in Chile after socialist Salvador Allende was elected and left shortly before the US/CIA-sponsored fascist coup that put Augusto Pinochet into power. Most importantly to this issue of *INSUBORDINATION*, *West Bloc Dissident* is a story about using alternative media to fight the US ruling class' bloodthirsty power grab for control of the world.

Any of Blum's three books are highly recommended to both the seasoned anti-war organizer and the less-informed person looking to learn more about US foreign policy. I spoke with William Blum in August, 2002.

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**It's pushed and accepted by everyone that the US government actually means well with its foreign policy... That's the biggest lie of all.**

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**Hans:** Many US dissidents are currently contemplating to what extent the Bush administration and other powerful people are complicit in the Sept.11 attacks. Where do you stand on this?

**Bill:** I doubt very much whether he (or his aides) knew the exact details (like the plan to use airplanes as missiles). I suspect that the FBI was well aware of several of the hijackers who were studying at flight schools that the FBI and CIA were in touch with. The FBI has admitted that 2 or 3 of the hijackers were under surveillance. I'm sure the boarding of these planes by some of these people was not unknown to the authorities. The FBI has had a policy of allowing such plots to go forward so that they can observe them. The longer they proceed, the more details the FBI can learn and the more people they can ensnare in the end. SO I think they allowed it to go forward without knowing the full deadliness of the plans. I think if they had known what exactly was planned, they probably would have stepped in sooner. One motivation is that the powers that be in the US always need enemies to justify their swollen budgets, to enhance their careers, to justify US foreign policy, and to crack down on dissent at home. They need enemies on a continuous basis. They allowed these men to go forward with whatever they had planned in that context. They wanted to, and have in fact used the events of that day in countless ways to advance their agendas (personal and political).

**Hans:** Looking at how the hijackers were armed with box-cutters, do you think it is really possible for the US intelligence community to stop something like this?

**Bill:** They can certainly make it much more difficult for potential hijackers, but in the end the "war on terrorism" cannot be based on such things. The US will have to change its foreign policy. I believe its US foreign policy that motivates people all over the world to hate US foreign policy and carry out terrorist acts. The terrorists themselves have made it very clear over the years exactly why they're doing what they're doing. They've made all kinds of allusions to the US support of Israel, the US military bases in Saudi Arabia, the continual bombing and sanctions on Iraq, and many other things when they explain their motives. There's no reason to doubt their word in this context. For me, the only way to fight terrorism is to change US foreign policy, not to institute draconian security checks at airports.

**Hans:** In the past you have argued that the United States does not necessarily want Saddam Hussein out of power. In light of the current preparation for a massive escalation of the bombing of Iraq, do you see any reason to change your position?

**Bill:** I cannot pinpoint exactly to what extent the powers that be may have changed their view about him. There were reasons that they did not want him out back in 1991, even though they won't admit that. It appears that they didn't want him out in 1991 because they didn't know what would replace him. If he was replaced by any kind of democratic government, that would not sit well with their neighbors and US allies like Saudi Arabia and

Kuwait. If he was replaced by a Kurdish state that would not have sat very well with Turkey. Therefore, if he was replaced by any kind of progressive government, that would not sit well with people in Washington.

This uncertainty of who his replacement will be, still remains. It remains to be seen whether or not they will actually take him out of power. I cannot predict every twist and turn of US foreign policy. I don't know if the people that actually plan and carry out the activities could even answer your question.

**Hans:** In your opinion, what is the biggest lie that the corporate media makes about US foreign policy?

**Bill:** It's pushed and accepted by everyone that the US government actually means well with its foreign policy. People assume and believe that in our foreign policy we may make mistakes, blunders, that cause more harm than good, or that in certain case

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## INSUBORDINATION

### Special Mini-Issue on Media, Censorship and War

Welcome to this special issue of INSUBORDINATION which focuses on the role of the corporate media in supporting the horrific and murderous actions of the US military around the world. Staff photojournalist Hans Bennett interviews anti-war media activists Norman Solomon, William Blum, and the folks at AWOL magazine. The Norman Solomon and AWOL interviews have been shortened for the purposes of this special interview. The complete unedited interviews will appear in INSUBORDINATION's giant media issue (due out in the Winter of 2003).

This issue also features essays by our generation's most censored journalist: death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Beginning as Minister of Information of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party, Mumia continues to expose the racist child murderers that rule this country, from his Pennsylvania death row cell. For more information about Mumia's case, please visit the [www.mumia.org](http://www.mumia.org) website or contact the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal at (215) 476-8812 or (215) 476-5416.

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Thanks again for reading!

—Editor Herb Avram



**FREE PALESTINE:** Families call for an end to US-backed war crimes in Palestine during a Washington, DC march.

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we may be counterproductive. But, people claim to the basic belief that in those policies the US government does mean well.

That's the biggest lie of all. The US could not care less about the welfare of any people around the world. They hardly care about the US people, so why would they care about foreign peoples? It's not that they want to hurt these people. They are amoral more than immoral. They just don't care. They are out to satisfy the needs of the US Empire and they don't care who gets hurt in the process.

**Hans:** In your newest book, *West Block Dissident* you write about how your good friend and radical journalist, Sal, was spying on you for the CIA. Looking back, do you think there was really any way you could have known Sal was fishy?

**Bill:** Concerning Sal, I was a bit naïve. It wouldn't happen now. There were reasons to be suspicious and I did not follow up on them, as I should have. This was 1969 and we still had a lot to learn about the ways of the authorities.

**Hans:** What should you have been looking for?

**Bill:** I should have checked on his credentials, on his schooling

that he claimed to have, and I should have pressed him about where he was getting his money from. He was spending more money than he should have been based on his income. The money and the background would have been enough if I had followed through on it.

**Hans:** Regarding the US blockade on Cuba, some argue that it may stop soon because US companies want in on the investment that both Canada and European countries have in Cuba. Others argue that lifting the blockade before the revolution is crushed would be conceding defeat to the Cuban Revolution, and therefore probably won't happen? Where do you stand on this?

**Bill:** If the US government wanted to lift the blockade to help US business, they would have done it years ago. So obviously that is not enough to make them lift the blockade. They have other fac-

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**Almost by definition, no one has this money except for conservatives.**

**The game is fixed.**

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tors involved. Especially now with President George W.'s brother Jeb Bush running for governor of Florida, he will need the support of the Cuban exile community. I don't think we will see any change in US policy towards Cuba under Bush. There will be some day because nothing lasts forever. But I can't really say when.

**Hans:** What do you think is the most significant accomplishment of the alternative media that has arisen since the anti-Vietnam War movement?

**Bill:** The obvious answer is that they have presented an alternative view of the world both in terms of news and analysis. I certainly have benefited greatly from that over the years. Now with the Internet, I'm sure their reach has extended much further than before. I'm sure many people have benefited in those ways. I wish them more power.

**Hans:** Where do you think the alternative media is still falling short?

**Bill:** It falls short in terms of having enough money to put out for example, a daily newspaper, or to have your own TV network. In order to reach the masses of the US, you have to have things like that. It takes lots of money and almost by definition no one has this money except for the conservatives. The game is fixed.

**Hans:** Is there anything else you would like to add for the interview?

**Bill:** When looking at the war waged on Afghanistan, it's remarkable that the US government has now killed with its bombing, more innocent civilians than died on Sept.11. I think that is the height of irony and it is certainly a war crime but no US official will ever have to face a court in The Hague or elsewhere for those crimes. That's the way it is. ∞

# The Story Behind *AWOL Magazine*

An interview with *AWOL* staffers by Hans Bennett

*AWOL* magazine is a joint project between the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors' Third World Outreach Program and Revolution Out of Truth and Struggle (ROOTS)/War Resisters League. An interview with the founder of *AWOL* magazine, Mario Africa, is featured in *INSUBORDINATION*'s second issue (on Armed Struggle and Political Prisoners After Sept. 11). The introduction in *AWOL*'s first issue explains:

In a culture saturated with pro-military propaganda, corporate growth monsters snatching up our babies and using them for fodder for their capitalistic wars, *AWOL* stands as the antithesis to that system.

Through our written word and our spoken, we rap the realness of the war on the poor, colonized, and oppressed. Whether it be due to U.S. military occupation of Vieques or the hyper locking up industry, or racial profiling of youth of color, we understand they are all inherently linked to form the chains of our oppression. We in *AWOL* understand this militarism involves more than bombing of the U.S. of other countries, but also how much in common we have with those 'other' communities in the policing and imprisonment of our won third world communities.

There are two parts to *AWOL*: the zine and the CD. There are also two purposes to *AWOL*. First, to help disseminate the information against the military machine, as well as the entire corrupt system built on our backs. But it is also a place to showcase the work of revolutionary artists who are staying true to the movement for social change and therefore forfeiting any play by the jiggy mainstream music industry. *AWOL* isn't going to buy you a beamer or allow you to bling, but we hope to serve as a medium so that they may reach a larger audience, as well as other artists and revolutionaries.

The CD in the first issue features Spearhead, C Rayz Walz, Seeds of Wisdom (the revolutionary youth of the MOVE Organization—ages 9 to 22), 3RD WORLDWIDE, Ricanstruction, Luminous Flux, and much more including Dead Prez's song "Cop Shot" (which samples KRS-One's "Black Cop").

The magazine itself is packed with high quality visual art and writing (including poetry). In his essay "Blood Money," Kevin Ramirez writes about the Navy's recruitment of youth of color through *The Source* hip hop magazine. In it he contextualizes this with the US Navy's bombing of Vieques to explain the blood of genocide dripping from *The Source*'s pages. In another essay, filmmaker Spike Lee has his Ghetto Pass revoked for using his filmmaker's skills to help the Navy specifically recruit black youth through the use of hip hop and jazz culture. Chuck D writes about this visit with Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row. Quite disturbing is an essay by Chicano anarchist political prisoner Rob Thaxton documenting the institutionalization of rape within US prisons. *AWOL* also conducts interviews with both Michael Franti (of Spearhead) and Luminous Flux.

The second issue has just been released this summer. The CD features The Coup, Immortal Technique, Damian Marley (featuring Dead Prez), Yellow Rage, Good Sista Bad Sista, War Club, and Fine Arts Militia (which includes Chuck D of Public Enemy) as well as many other revolutionary artists.

The writing and visual art inside the magazine is equally impressive. Mumia Abu-Jamal exposes the World Economic Forum for the super-predator that it is. Good Sista Bad Sista interviews Boots from The Coup, Luminous Flux interviews Damian Marley, and Not4Prophet interviews Chuck D & Brian Hardgroove of the Fine Arts Militia. Wyclef Jean and Canibus have their Ghetto Pass revoked for their advocacy of post Sept. 11

US military aggression. Also quite interesting is the essay "Not Quite Outcasts: Hip Hop, Black Women, and Neo-Blaxploitation," by Aisha K. Finch. There is much more high quality work inside this new issue. The low price of only \$5 for this glossy and color ink magazine that includes a CD is an excellent deal and is highly recommended.

This Fall, 2002, I sat down and interviewed *AWOL* staffers Walidah, Kevin, and Veronica. The interview has been shortened for this mini-issue of *INSUBORDINATION*. The complete interview will be published in January's mega-issue being published in January 2003.

**Hans:** The concrete motive of your magazine and CD is to challenge the US military's recruitment of youth of color. To do this, how do you style *AWOL*'s journalism.

**Kevin:** The most highly recruited youth right now are youth of color (predominantly Latinos). Youth of color are who *AWOL* magazine speaks to and who it's about. Most people that submit are youth of color and the style of writing is directed towards and speaks to this already highly targeted group of kids. The US military is using hip hop to target these kids by putting advertisements on hip hop TV shows on BET and MTV, as well as in hip hop publications. So they are already making a concentrated effort to speak to the hip hop nation's youth. *AWOL*'s goal is to flip that around.

**Hans:** What type of writing do you print? What type of writing do you shy away from?

**Kevin:** We don't use big lofty words that only the college educated can understand. We do have to educate young people, but also speak in a language that they can understand. We have writings with words like "bling bling" or other kinds of slang words that your average person will automatically understand.

**Walidah:** We also use ideology that links the US military to other stuff affecting folks' lives. A lot of times kids will be like "what does the US military have to do with me? I'm not planning on going in," or "I'm a woman, so they're not targeting me," even though they are targeting women of color. By linking the military and the whole idea of militarization and warfare in terms of the way it's waged by the US upon third world countries, we can bring in issues that effect people's lives in a concrete way. We can talk about prisons and the fact that youth of color are increasingly left with a choice between prison or the military. Those are the 2 career options that youth of color have left. This way we can make it real and concrete by showing that everything is linked and we have to deal with all of these oppressions together. Militarism is really underlying all of this. The police are a military force occupying our communities just like the US military occupies third world communities, and those are the enforcers of the system. So we need to deal with the enforcers so that when we are trying to make social change we don't have the system come down on us.

**Hans:** How many magazines are printed and distributed?

**Kevin:** Our first volume we did an initial run of 5000 magazines with a follow up of 2500. We have 5000 of the second issue (JUST RELEASED!) and are projecting another 5,000 issue run.

**Hans:** Where are they distributed?

**Kevin:** The main headquarters are the CCCO office here in Philadelphia and New York, and the War Resisters League office

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**AWOL MAGAZINE:** The Spring 2001 Issue.

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in New York. From there they go to our contributors, who help us distribute them by selling them at their shows and in their communities. There are also individuals that contact us and want to get involved with AWOL and offer to distribute them at concerts, Food Not Bombs tables, etc. There are also the independent and revolutionary bookstores who carry them for us.

**Walidah:** We also take it to the schools and distribute there. So, if we go to the school to do counter-recruitment work for CCCO, we take AWOLs and give them away to those that are most targeted. In these places that are the most under-funded and impoverished, we give them away for free, and we have a certain number set aside that we can give away for free because we're not about making money. But we're also not just about getting a magazine out and being dope and getting folks to say "This looks hot!" It's about getting the information out there because people don't necessarily need leaders but they do need to have the information to make choices themselves. This is supported by the grassroots distribution style we have. If the magazine ends up at Tower Records, that's cool, but it's not what we're really focusing on.

**Hans:** Chicano anarchist political prisoner Robert Thaxton (who's writing is featured in both issues of AWOL) was sentenced to 8 years in prison for throwing a rock at a police officer in self-defense during a police attack upon a demonstration in Eugene, Oregon. Thaxton (aka Rob Los Ricos) has reported that because he crossed the line from an absolute "non-violent" protester, to one who was unwilling to accept a police beating without physical resistance, he was not able to get much legal and political support

from Oregon's (and particularly Eugene's) traditional "peace and justice" community.

The inside front cover of AWOL has an illustration showing a lower level US soldier smashing his superior officer in the face. Furthermore, the inside cover declares support for political prisoners who unabashedly continue to advocate armed self-defense in response to racist state violence: Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, the MOVE 9, and Russell "Maroon" Shoats. How has this gone over with the traditional "peace and justice community?"

**Walidah:** Rob is a contributor to AWOL. We're trying to print a lot of different voices and to support those in our community who were doing good work and got captured and punished by the system. So we always have poems by Fred Hampton Jr. (a recently released political prisoner). The new essay by Thaxton talks about how in Oregon's prisons, being an anarchist makes you part of a "gang" and what that means for him as a Latino anarchist.

The cop that he threw a rock at was down in the LA riots and said "at least I got to beat up some spics." He works in Eugene Oregon's Latino community and is known for brutalizing people of color in that neighborhood. This cop was simply excited when the clash between protesters and police began. Rob saw him coming at him and says he tried to throw the rock over his head to distract him so he could run away. It ended up hitting the cop in the chest and Rob got 8 years.

Concerning the tension between absolute pacifism, self-defense and armed struggle, we have our mission statement on the first page of the magazine. We are funded by the CCCO and WRL—which are both anti-military pacifist organizations. Like you mentioned, we have art depicting self-defense. In our statement we talk about the right of people of color to self-determination and to decide how to wage their own battles and combat the system. It's really up to the people who are on the front lines every day to decide.

While CCCO and WRL may not agree with every single thing that's in the magazine, we're creating a space where people of color and revolutionary artists of color can make their voices heard and talk about their concerns, lives, and experiences. You have to create a space where people are not censored. You can't say "You can talk about anything except..." That's a really patronizing and paternal way of doing organizing. It replicates the same types of systems we're trying to tear down in terms of a hierarchy: someone at the top telling the little (mostly brown) people at the bottom what to think and do. We are trying to create a situation where people can put their voices out and determine for themselves what needs to happen and what methods should be employed.

**Hans:** Looking at how Rob Thaxton was ostracized, how has your relationship been to the traditional "peace and justice community?"

**Kevin:** We already ran into this problem because on our first CD, there's a track called "Cop Shot" (by Dead Prez, who samples KRS-One's song "Black Cop"). For a while we were debating whether or not to put that in there, as well as image of the soldier punching his Sargent in the face. What we really stand for are the raw voices of people of color. These people face oppression and violence by the police and the military every day of their lives.

For the peace and "justice" community of Eugene to turn their backs on Rob Thaxton is pretty disgusting. What's more violent? Aguy with a rock or a gauntlet of riot cops with batons, billy clubs, extra clips for ammunition, plastic handcuffs, stun grenades, tear gas and all of that? So I would say that they're the violent ones, NOT Rob Thaxton. We're not going to withdraw our support for Rob Thaxton because he threw a rock at a cop. Just like in our

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magazine, we don't call for armed rebellions everywhere. But if somebody submitted a piece about armed rebellion, we'd want to create a forum for that kind of discussion because it's crucial for the movement to go forward instead of being stagnant. It's stagnant right now because of limiting ourselves to marching, protesting, and other stuff. To paraphrase the "Cop Shot" song, the most important line says that "self defense is not a violent act".

**Hans:** How did this debate about the "Cop Shot" song finish, and how has the response been from the peace and justice folks?

**Kevin:** We didn't have to, but we decided to put a disclaimer in there that said that the views expressed in the magazine weren't the explicit views of CCCO or WRL. People that submit to AWOL don't necessarily have to be pacifists.

**Walidah:** I think the response has been generally good, largely because the response from youth of color has been so amazing. Many really eat up the magazine and feel a connection to it. The peace community is seeing that this is something reaching this entire segment of the population that they pretty much have ignored or preferred to simply talk about as opposed to go to and listen to. So they can't put us down too much because what we do is constructive. They may not necessarily agree with our methods, but they can't front on our results, so they've kept quiet about it. If they have concerns they don't voice them too loudly.

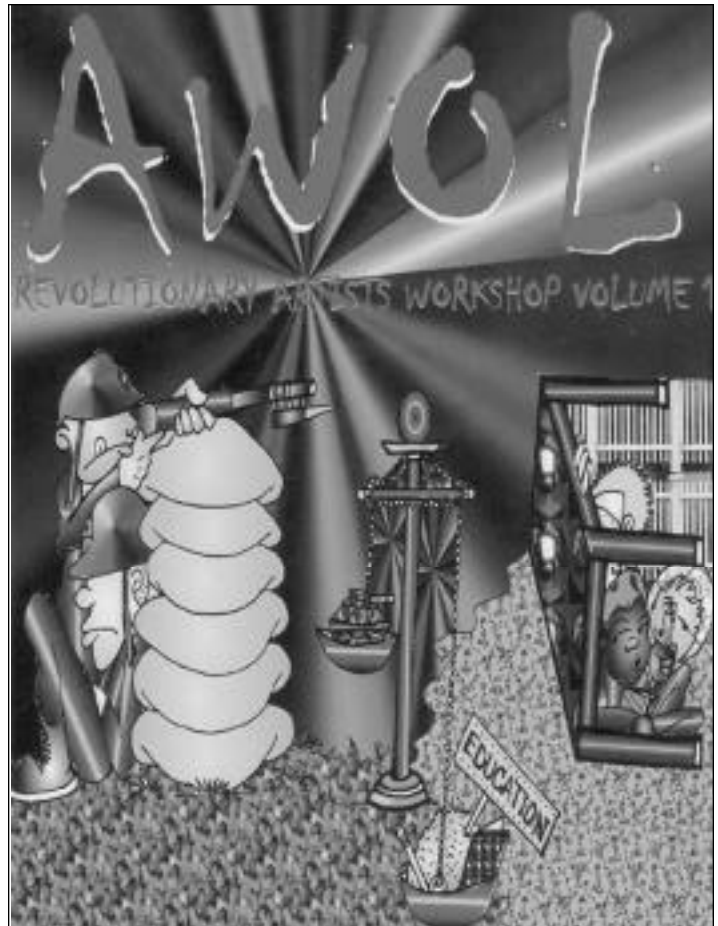
**Veronica:** In another one of your questions, you ask "if not with the US military, then who are you willing to fight for?" "To build off of what Kevin was saying, lots of peace activists have that choice. They have that choice to not have to struggle to survive. They get to choose what they want to fight for versus other people's reality is violence and having to react to that violence that is imposed on them. So in reflecting on what youth think and encounter on the streets in their daily lives is what AWOL is for. It's not to give voice to a peace activist who says "I don't believe in war because I don't believe in dying. It's to give voice to someone who is seeing people die all the time as a result of that bloodshed. Instead of "what kind of war are you willing to fight," its "what kind of war do you have to fight?" It's not really a choice.

**Hans:** Please name the 2-4 present day and 2-4 third world revolutionary movements resisting white world supremacy and US imperialism from history that you find the most inspiring.

**Veronica:** One of the most inspiring would definitely be the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. They've created an autonomous way of living that is nationally focused and community based, but with an international spirit. Their movement is completely dignified, militant, protective, but creative at the same. What's really special about them is that they are an ongoing creation.

They're like nothing that's ever been before and they don't ever front like anything big. They're always in this constant movement of evolution. A couple of the main people that went to the jungle before the EZLN was actually formed, were the marxist-leninist people like Marcos and a couple of his homies. He said that the turning point which made the Zapatistas grow and become strong was when they were able to become not an "army for the people," but "a people of the army." They were able to become each other and all that marxist-leninist shit was nothing compared to the reality of what was happening in Chiapas.

From that handful of people in the single digits, it grew into this huge movement of over 1,200 communities. Remarkably, since it's only been around since the 80s, it's still very young. Since then, they now have an army, an indigenous peoples council that makes decisions for the communities. Every community has its own schools, autonomous medical clinics, stores, co-operatives where



**AWOL MAGAZINE:** The back cover of Volume 1.

they make clothes. The doctors at the clinics have their own garden. Every institution they have is self-sustainable.

They're doing their own shit and at the same time they're aware of what's happening to Mumia, and in South Africa. They take a stand on everything. This spirit is very rare in these times because many people shift more towards nationalism. Not like the "nationalism" of the 60s and 70s, but this totally new "only me", self centered nationalism that tends to be really destructive to a lot of things that have been created out of the struggles of the 60s and 70s.

I respect Cuba a lot, but I also have my reservations about "communism," but I really respect a lot of the programs and institutions that they've been able to create —like the medical programs. Their medical school is the best in the world and it's free. Anybody can come there. That's some shit. They send brigades to third world nations all around the world. So they have that international spirit. There's their Organization in Solidarity with Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This outlook is very rare in the US. People are very divided and the powers that be like that. It holds us back from creating a movement.

The truth is that we don't have that much movement. There are things happening, but its not really taking us anywhere. We have our rallies, protests, and youth programs that are effective but not necessarily moving towards any established, autonomous space that's going to be separate from what we're struggling against — which is this capitalist system we're currently forced to live in.

**Walidah:** I really admire revolutionary struggles that value a lot of the things that AWOL's about. We're about ending this US mil-

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**AWOL MAGAZINE:** From the website.

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itarist capitalist, patriarchal, and white supremacist oppression but we don't come with this dogmatic set agenda that's like "this is the party line and you've got to follow it". There are people that are down with AWOL who are communist, socialist, moderates, anarchists, and then people who don't name themselves anything and don't give a fuck as long as revolutionary change is happening (people who call themselves revolutionaries and believe in nothing more than social change).

At the same time we're working to tear down all these evils, we're also working to build up an alternative to show people and create space where we can live as we should have lived and can live once this shit is gone. So I think its real important to both of those aspects, like Veronica was talking about with the Zapatistas. This means creating a space where you show people that its possible and that anything can happen. Indigenous people in Mexico (who are the most impoverished and oppressed people) have created this amazing revolutionary community that is built on love and respect and social change that also incorporates the principles of feminism and radical anti-racism without every having to use those words; without speaking this rhetoric that so many activists get caught up in, like "Do you know what patriarchy means? If not then we can't talk to you."

If they can do it, then how the hell are people in this country, in the belly of the beast with all this wealth around us, how are we going to sit here and say "We can't do it. We don't have the resources." That's bullshit. Get off your ass, take control of those resources, and use them for the good of the people. You can't just

ask people to change everything they're doing, without offering them an alternative. You can't just say "don't listen to Jay-Z or 103.9." People will ask what the hell they're supposed to listen to if they like hip hop. So with AWOL, we put out a magazine critiquing mainstream hip hop and all the deficiencies that also gives people a dope CD to replace the stuff that we're telling you not to listen to. It's all about giving people other options. This is a major thign that has galvanized revolutionary movements whether its Marcus Garvey on down through the Panthers and the Zapatistas. Any movement that has drawn in the mass of people has shown an alternative.

**Kevin:** Any movement, group, or individual that's standing up and resisting this system of white world supremacy and US imperialism is inspiring. Colombian rebels fighting crop fumigation or Shining Path guerillas fighting Fujimori's troops is inspiring. The tactics and strategy might not be something we particularly agree with and would condone and do with our own movement, but that action is inspiring stuff that we have to add to and build on.

**Hans:** What groups from the past have you found particularly inspiring?

**Kevin:** The Cuban Revolution, American Indian Movement, Black Panther Party, Puerto Rican independence groups, the Black Liberation Army.

**Hans:** Why the BLA?

**Veronica:** Because they formed out of a movement that was powerful and strong, but they took it to another level. They weren't afraid to be militant. They weren't separatists and again they had the internationalist spirit. Not all BLA cats were Panthers. A lot were from the Puerto Rican and Chicano movements. Alot of people don't know that, but that's why they are respected internationally. That's why Assata Shakur can be given asylum in Cuba. Furthermore, they moved with that spirit of defense and protection. Further, they were very disciplined to be able to operate like that both nationally and internationally.

**Walidah:** Today and throughout history there has always been struggle and resistance. As Kevin said, it's inspiring. It's amazing. In school we were taught that the 60s were the only time people ever rose up and now everything's cool because they struggled and sat at lunch counters and got shit poured on their heads, were fire hosed and attacked by police dogs. We're taught that before the 60s people were just kind of chillin'. That's bullshit.

In every single period in US and world history there has been rebellion against oppression. Whenever there's oppression, people rebel and that's how we know its right. This is the response of the human spirit saying "No, we're not going to take this". Even if people had no knowledge of any revolutionary struggle, they still rebel.

I think throughout US history you can point at any time and see some amazing movement happening. In the 30s, this country was on the verge of a revolution. If WWII hadn't happened, the US might not be a capitalist society today. They were on the brink of changing stuff because of the depression and the energy and radicalism of the 20s. People were coming together and there was a lot of leadership coming from communities of color. We never learn about how there was a chance to create a real revolution. We're taught in school that people were poor, waiting in bread lines and then everybody was thankful that WWII happened. That's bullshit. The Brotherhood of Pullman Porters and the IWW are examples of the extensive cross-racial organizing that had people of color leading the way.

**Veronica:** The list definitely goes on and on. The monks in  
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Vietnam who set themselves on fire, the movement against South African apartheid, and the Maori in New Zealand.

**Walidah:** We've got to make sure the real story is told. The official story about South Africa is that US college students (mostly white) boycotted the South African government and made them end apartheid. "Those white kids freed Nelson Mandela. Now everything's perfect there. There's no more racism and everyone's happy". First of all, that's complete bullshit. South African people in the streets by the hundreds of thousands dying and being arrested is what changed things. Hundreds of thousands were arrested in the span of ten years just resisting the pass book laws. They then turned to armed struggle out of necessity. Nelson Mandela was in jail because he was the leader of the revolutionary armed resistance of the ANC. Don't nobody want to talk about that.

They say "Nelson Mandela was so "peaceful". However this brother was down, that's why he was imprisoned. Before that they just censored him and put him under house arrest. They imprisoned him when he picked up the gun and said "we have to take this to the next level, because this is not working." That is the kind of pressure that changes things. It goes back to that self-determination. They felt that the non-violent struggle was not working. They made a decision that it was time to engage in armed struggle. History wants to rewrite this, but we must see it for what it is. The white kids in the US protesting apartheid were definitely helpful, but it was the South Africans on the ground dying that changed things, just like it was the Viet Cong's killing, dying, and fighting that ended the Vietnam War. The protests in the US were helpful, but the armed resistance won the war.

**Veronica:** I would like to say, though, that the international support is really helpful. People in the US have that privilege and obligation because we live in the belly of the beast. Since we're in the center of the empire that causes much of the suffering around the world. So everybody in the US, white, people of color, young people and old people, everybody has an obligation to take a stand when somebody's being fucked with internationally. There should be more people in the belly of the beast fighting it. If we can't confront it here, the rest of the world's fucked.

**Walidah:** We also have to think about how we're going to struggle. What is a permitted protest where you talked to the police before hand and your completely safe. This is very different than people walking in front of their house and getting blown away (either here in this country or overseas). It's very important for this movement to think about how we should struggle. How does it relate to the people on the front lines everyday? What kind of risk are we taking? Social change is not going to be a safe thing. We can't just ask the system to stop oppressing and killing people and expect the rulers to say "oh thank you for pointing that out". This system is going to come with all of its power and its weapons to crush you if you are really down for making a change. People need to recognize and be committed to that.

**Hans:** AWOL examines the historic relationship of the US military to communities of color both at home and abroad. What is the US military all about?

**Kevin:** You have to look at the US military from its very beginning. It came out of the whole idea of fighting off the British because they supposedly wanted a land where could practice their freedom of religion and blah, blah, blah. After kicking out Britain and writing the constitution, it then functioned to protect these European settlers from the "savage" Indians who then had to be neutralized, as well as catching rebels and runaway slaves. The military was used to take land from the indigenous population. When their land was taken away, their lifestyle and culture was also basically destroyed.

That was their agenda then. Today is basically the same. A prime example would be the Special Forces unit of the US army, who are

presently in over 60 different countries. They were created by President Kennedy to basically train other militaries and police forces to crush rebel and guerilla movements that are trying to keep their land and cultures alive.

The next part of the question was the motive behind US foreign policy. The US military and what is called the military-industrial complex is basically run by corporations and industrial companies. You look at any of these 60 places where the US military is training, there's something going on there as far as oil pipelines, land that they want to take so to destroy crops that have been grown for generations and graze cattle for McDonald's, or any raw materials or resources that they want. US investment is not going to benefit Bolivia or Peru, for instance. It's going to benefit some corporation owned by some US or British company.

That's what the US military is all about. Right now they're trying to recruit people of color, ship them off to some third world country to fight and help kill the people there. It's basically divide and conquer. They're been doing it since they started.

**Walidah:** People of color have always been expendable in the US military as cannon fodder on the front lines. From the Civil War when slaves were volunteering to fight for what they thought was their freedom. Unfortunately they were used as shields and often not given weapons to defend themselves with. This theme follows with every war since. Take WWII where black soldiers actually had to have the campaign of a "double victory." This meant a victory against the Nazis and fascism as well as the against racism at home and within the military. There was no time when it was more clear. They were fighting racist German. However, this evil incarnate's policies weren't all that different from the US. In fact Hitler was like, "yo, I learned a lot of my shit from the US, thanks guys." Most of these evil regimes that came into power in fact learned from the US. It's the same thing going on today. It's always third world people dying and fighting to kill other third world people for the interests of a white-dominated corporate society.

**Kevin:** Let's use Iraq as an example. The people of Iraq have a right to elect their own president, but apparently not, in the eyes of the US. The US doesn't like Saddam Hussein, and they're drumming up support and mobilizing troops in preparation to topple Saddam Hussein and replace him with someone that the US likes.

**Hans:** What are people's favorite magazines?

**AWOL:** Redwire, Frontlines (published by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement), Red Eye,

**Hans:** Books?

**AWOL:** Our Word is our Weapon, by Subcommandante Marcos; Soledad Brother and Blood In My Eye by George Jackson; anything by Che or Mumia; Agents of Repression by Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall; bell hooks is always dope, especially Killing Rage and Outlaw Culture; Assata –the autobiography of Assata Shakur.

**Hans:** Revolutionaries?

**AWOL:** Assata Shakur, George Jackson, Mumia, MOVE, Yuri Kochiyama, Russell "Maroon" Shoates, Huey P. Newton, Ida B. Wells, Shaka, Curly Estremera, Leonard Peltier.

**Walidah:** I think naming off the top revolutionaries kind of makes it a cult of personality. People have done amazing work and need to be given mad props, but I think people are working every day to build and sustain the movement and they're never heard of. The folks who are community organizers and are working with youth against prisons and poverty, are the ones building the foundation that enables the big name people to do stuff. These people are also amazing revolutionaries that deserve credit.

**Hans:** Musical artists?

**AWOL:** Anyone on the AWOL CD, the Zapatista musical CD, Bob Marley, and many others.

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# Imperial Promises

Mumia Abu-Jamal

It is well for those who know to be leery of promises made by an Empire. For they will fulfill those they feel necessary to fulfill, and simply ignore those they feel are worthy of ignorance.

That is the very nature of empires.

At the end of the Vietnam War, a war-weary U.S. government, ready to leave Indochina for the shores of the United States, pledged to help reconstruct the war-ravished Vietnam, and in fact, agreed to pay reparations.

Over 30 years later, and not a dime, not a U.S. nickel has been paid to the People's Republic of Vietnam. Nor did the U.S. ever have any real intention of fulfilling the terms of the peace agreement signed at the negotiating table in Paris. An estimated 3 million Vietnamese people killed in the war, the rice fields and rivers poisoned by the herbicide, Agent Orange (which continues to poison an untold number of Vietnamese, generations later!), CIA assassinations of NLF, civilians and party leaders, torture, and thousands of American-fathered Vietnamese babies born in scorn, and the USA left in an imperial huff, and never looked back.

The lessons from history are indeed instructive, as we look at the looming specter of war on the horizons in Iraq. Predictably, there are promises from Bush Administration spokesmen that they will introduce "democracy" into Iraq, an echo of their promises in Vietnam. What motivates them, in truth, isn't 'democracy' (if you doubt this, you need only ask the citizens of Florida, who haven't seen any semblances of 'democracy' in the last few years), but the lure of 'black gold', 'Texas tea', or, as they used to say in the intro to that TV comedy, "The Beverly Hillbillies", "...Oil, that is."

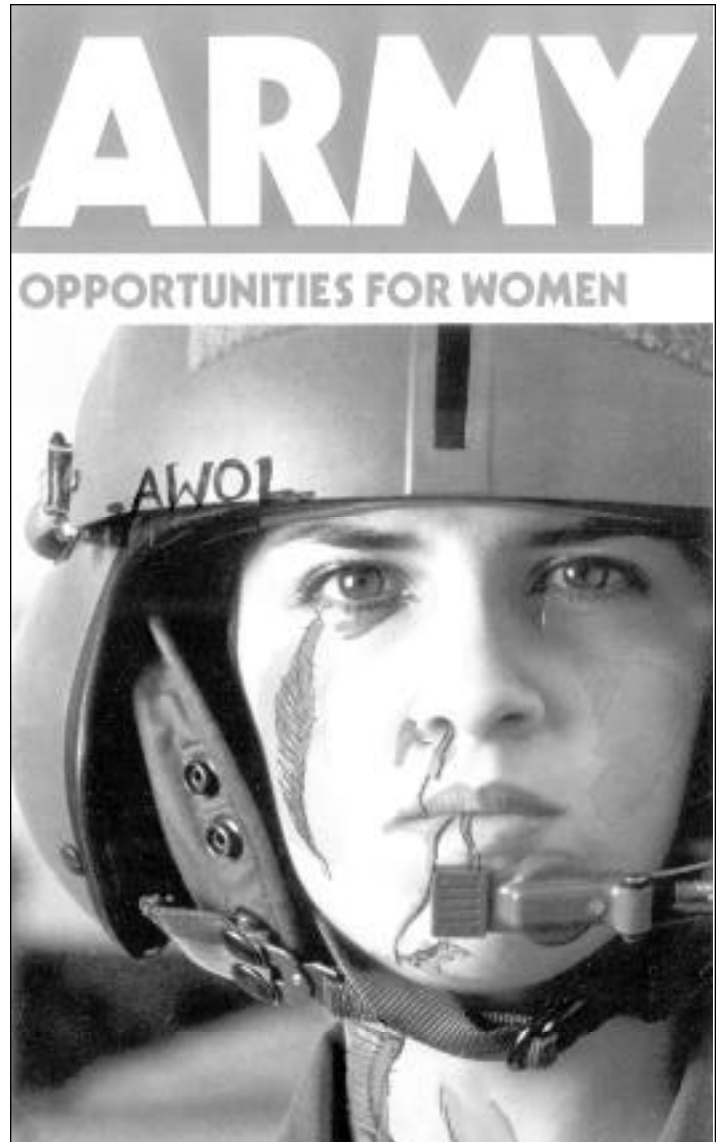
Again, a lesson from history, about what the Americans really care about, from a previous U.S.-Iraqi conflict, about 30 years ago:

General [Ahmed Hassan] Bakr nationalized Iraqi oil in 1972. President Richard Nixon immediately began to plot the reversal of his declaration, as America had done when Iran nationalized its oil in 1951. Nixon, along with the Shah, orchestrated the arming of the Iraqi Kurds against Bakr. Iraq was placed on America's list of nations that sponsored terrorism. This course of action was abruptly halted in 1975, when then Vice President [Saddam] Hussein and the Shah reached an agreement that ceded control of the strategically vital Shatt-al-Arab waterway in the Persian Gulf to Iran. In retrospect, it seems all too clear that Iraq's control of this waterway was the primary concern behind America's agitation against Iraq. Once the American-controlled Shah owned this passage to the Gulf, all American support to the Kurds ceased entirely. In commentary on this, Henry Kissinger stated, "Covert operations should not be confused with missionary work." Under Nixon, the arming of Iran by the United States was dramatically stepped up.

[Pitt, William Rivers & Scott Ritter, "War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know" (New York: Context Books, 2002, p. 18)]

Human Rights? War on Terrorism? Fight for Democracy? Like a 3 Card Monte game at 42nd Street in midtown Manhattan, the real play keeps moving, right before your eyes. But it's never what you think it is.

Recently, the Bush Administration's mouthpiece publicly advocated the assassination of a foreign leader. Bush flack Ari Fleisher, asked about the costs of a war with Iraq, answered that the cheapest price could be one bullet. When pressed, he said that the government wasn't advocating assassination, but noted that if



REVOLUTIONARY ART: From *AWOL Magazine*.

someone in Iraq wanted to make the price of the war cheap, "one bullet" (for Saddam, of course) would be cheapest.

Imperial Promises.

War without End.

For profit and for Privilege. Forever.

Amen.

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## An Interview with Lynne Stewart

10-19-02 by phone

**Lynne Stewart:** Good afternoon Mumia. What a pleasure this is.

**Mumia Abu-Jamal:** It is a pleasure for us both I hope.

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**FREEDOM:** Young men demonstrate in favor of a Free Palestine in Washington, DC.

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**LS:** I think so.

**MAJ:** You have been, seems to me, singled out by the highest levels of the Justice department for something that was not a crime, either now or even up until the signing of the infamous Patriot Act. Would you tell me what that was ?

**LS:** The Justice Department decided that things that I did as a lawyer are now to be outlawed. Are now to be made into crimes in order to deter other lawyers from vigorously defending people. What I basically did was I issued a press release on behalf of my client. They said that this press release was "materially aiding a terrorist organization". And as they have accused so many others recently of that same crime, it seems to have no bounds what so ever, and can be used just about for anything.

**MAJ:** So was this essentially illegal communication with your client?

**LS:** Well they had put on us a certain prison regulation, ah this is something that Leonard Peltier also suffers under in the federal system, it is called a Special Administrative Measure. Which lawyers and clients, not clients, but people that we represent must sign on to say that you will not communicate with the press on behalf of your client, thus making it impossible for any First Amendment right to be protected. In other words Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman was entombed in Minnesota he was not allowed to communicate with anyone but his lawyers and his wife in Egypt, once a month. We in controvention of these regulations, did make press releases on his behalf, but it is only now that has become an indictable offense.

**MAJ:** Isn't this kind of a- on its face violation of the first amendment?

**LS:** Isn't (it)! I could not agree with you more. But you know

they hide everything behind that cloak of security within the prison and now of course security for the whole nation. They are going to be the protectors of Americans, they who have done so much to make it impossible to protect this nation.

**MAJ:** So is it not also a fact that the U.S. government through the Justice Department monitored your communications with your client?

**LS:** Yes this press release was in May of 2000. For the next six months they went back and forth about whether they would let me into the prison again. They finally said oh yes you can go into the prison and we entered the prison again, only meanwhile they had set their cameras and tape recordings. So that every conversation that I had with Sheik Omar by telephone or in the prison were monitored. They heard every word that was said. In total degro- gation of the Sixth Amendment and of course the attorney client privilege which is part of that.

**MAJ:** It appears that is not just vanishing in federal prisons, it is vanishing in state prisons as well. Is that not so?

**LS:** Well I think so. You know the states are not very slow to follow any leads that big brother gives them, so I think that most lawyers nowadays are sort of looking over their shoulders and thinking to themselves, who may be listening in and if that doesn't create a chilling affect as you well know between the communication between attorney and client, we all assumed they assumed that they might be listening, but not that they might use these things as a basis for further prosecution.

**MAJ:** I would hope that you have heard from a number of your colleagues who are in stark protest against this latest governmental action?

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**ANTI-CAPITALIST:** Black blockers protest the Israeli government's occupation of Palestine.

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**LS:** The New York times ah wrote a piece in their magazine called "Left behind", I think more to encourage people to leave me behind, than to ah- but of course they have been saying that the left has been dead in this country for many years but to the contrary we are alive and well and I have gotten outstanding support, not only from the so called radical or leftist lawyers of the National Lawyers Guild and other organizations but from the other organizations but from the everyday mainstream lawyers who understand that if we can't do this work, even within this racist criminal justice system, the way we have always done it, there will be no right to defend anymore. That right will just vanish. So I have gotten marvelous support, I once said that you have to die to find out how many people love you, but I am getting it in this life.

**MAJ:** Well that is very good to know. I think that it should also be said – obviously I think - that this is not kind of a lawyers right, this is a right of the accused?

**LS:** Absolutely

**MAJ:** So it potentially affects thousands, if not tens of thousands of people, and perhaps millions.

**LS:** I said to a young documentary maker, you know it's really not about whether or not this can happen to you, but it is really about if it does happen to you, who are you going to call? Because there won't be a lawyer to call. The whole movement aspect of lawyering will disappear completely as they just knock us off one by one. And to me that is the real essence of this work, is that we be permitted to lawyer in the way that we lawyered throughout the 60's, the 70's, the 80's and defend people such as yourself in these cases as political people. Not just as defendant number 10872.

— YOU HAVE ONE MINUTE LEFT TO TALK —

**MAJ:** Lynn Stewart it is been my pleasure to talk to you and have others share our conversation, other than the government of course, and ah I support you, and I think what you are doing is quite wonderful.

**LS:** And I may say, Mumia I support (you) wholeheartedly. I am sitting in front of beautiful banner with African Cloth saying Free Mumia and all political prisoners, and (it has) been my work for thirty years and it will always be my work.

**MAJ:** We are going to have to create a new banner saying free Lynn Stewart.

**LS:** Yes, I am for that.

**MAJ:** Thank you very much.

**LS:** Thank you.

**MAJ:** All the best, Ona Move.

**LS:** You too dear. Bye bye.

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## The Genius of Dr. Huey P. Newton

Although maligned by traditional (read: "white") history, and virtually forgotten by a successive generation, Huey P. Newton  
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was, by any measure, a most remarkable man.

If one were to measure him by the founding of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (as it was originally named) with co-founder, Bobby G. Seale, in October 1966 in West Oakland, California, that alone would be historically significant.

But Dr. Newton, a truly deep thinker, suffered from a malady that causes many to be lost to the mists of history; he was a diffident, poor, public speaker, in a time, and in an age, when radical oratory was very much in demand. Luckily, some of his thoughts were placed down on paper, where they could be studied devoid of the excess of emotion that sometimes clouds our thinking.

His writings, of the early 1970s, predicted the rise of the U.S. Empire, the coming of globalism (which he called and coined,

politics, for he clearly foresaw the spectacle of the rich and the super-rich, using their own wealth, not just to buy politicians, but to \*become\* them. Back in the age of the 'Robber Barons', the Duponts, Mellons, and Vanderbilts, the role of politician was looked down on with snooty disdain. Now, as we see in the "Millionaires' Club" that is the U.S. Senate, not to mention the well-heeled clique in the US presidential cabinet, the rich no longer trust their political servants to do their bidding. They do it themselves.

Think about the obscene amounts of money people spend, *of their own money*, for a seat in the Senate, or to become an ambassador, or to sit at the table of a government regulatory agency.

Who now seriously doubts that U.S. foreign policy is really run from Wall Street rather than Pennsylvania Avenue?

Huey P. Newton saw these things, and many other things, but

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**Huey P. Newton inspired young Black men and women, who believed in next to nothing, to believe that they were right to resist the Empire, that they were right to resist the deadly onslaughts of the state, that they were right to struggle for the freedom of their people. And that a new world was possible.**

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"reactionary intercommunalism"), the fall of the Soviet Empire, the illusory limits of nationalism, and even the post-war weakness of the Vietnamese Republic.

When he began talking about "intercommunalism", many in the so-called left ridiculed it, as diversions from classic Marxism. Huey explained that Marx himself wasn't a Marxist, but examined and analyzed social, economic and historical trends, using a technique called "dialectical materialism", or a study of the "struggle of opposites." On Russia, in 1972, Dr. Newton criticized their acceptance of the U.S. 'peaceful co-existence' plan, which he said led directly to the crippling of people's movements around the world:

The Russians allowed this to happen through naivete or treachery. Regardless of how this came about, they damaged the ability of the Third World to resist. They could have given the Third World every technique available to them long ago. With the high quality of Soviet development at a time when the United States was less advanced than it is today, the Russians could have built up the necessary force to oppose imperialism. Now, all that they can do is whimper like whipped dogs and talk about peaceful co-existence so that they will not be destroyed. This presents the world with the hard fact that the United States \*is the only state power in the world.\* Russia has become, like all other nations, no more than a satellite of the United States. American rulers do not care about how much Russians say that they are the Soviets, as long as Ford can build its motor company in their territory [Newton, H.P., "The Technology Question"].

Dr. Newton wrote those words in 1972.

In an article in 1974, Dr. Newton saw the U.S. as "world cop", and as an inheritor from other empires in decline:

Thus, the United States has replaced Britain as the guardian power and policeman of the international system of property and privilege, the corporate ruling class has less often been able to entrust policy to indirectly controlled representatives and has more often had to enter directly the seats of government itself.

This, from his 1974 article, "Who Makes U.S. Foreign Policy?", Newton provides insight, not just into the international (or "intercommunal") arena, but also into the nature of domestic

he could not see the secret tactics used against him by the U.S. government, through the FBI COINTELPRO program; and did not know about the real source of letters coming to him from government typewriters.

In the history of a people with one of the longest and richest in the United States, Huey P. Newton deserves a significant place. Not just because of his courage, 'though he had tons of that. Not just for his brilliance, 'though he had a whole lot of that. He inspired young Black men and women, who believed in next to nothing, to believe that they were right to resist the Empire, that they were right to resist the deadly onslaughts of the state, that they were right to struggle for the freedom of their people. And that a new world was possible.

That was no small feat in the late 1960s, and early 1970s.

His books, *Revolutionary Suicide*, *To Die For the People*, and *War Against the Panthers*, as well as the articles that are extant from the *Black Panther* newspaper deserve a far wider study, especially among Black youth, than they receive now. Thankfully, many of the prime selections from these and other works are available to new, young readers in the newly-published *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, edited by David Hilliard and David Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002).

His ideas deserve the opportunity to inspire and inform a new generation of activists, who will be stunned by his insights into globalism, the ecology, and the role of women.

There is a reason that the government went all-out to destroy him.

There is a reason that the corporate press scape-goated him.

There is a reason why millions of African-Americans (and, indeed, other Americans!) really haven't the faintest idea who he was, and what he stood for.

He was, first and foremost, a revolutionary.

And to the well-to-do, the corporate elites, to them all, this meant enemy.

It's time for a new generation to learn why.

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# No More Lies: Challenging Corporate Media in a Time of War

## Hans Bennett interviews Norman Solomon

Norman Solomon is the Executive Director of the Institute for Public Accuracy as well as a longtime journalist exposing media deception. As well as writing for big-name anti-corporate publications such as *Extra!* (published by media activist organization FAIR) and *Z Magazine* he was recently featured in the *LA Times* and has also appeared on the shows of corporate media news giants like *CNN* and *National Public Radio*. As one of the preeminent alternative journalists today, his work is an extremely valuable tool for all of us who want to understand how we have been lied to by the powerful. His most recent book is *Habits of Highly Deceptive Media*, published by Common Courage Press. I spoke with him in early August, 2002. The interview has been shortened for this special mini-issue of *INSUBORDINATION*. The complete interview will be published in January, 2003's mega-issue on the media.

**Hans:** A few years ago, you wrote an essay in *Extra!* magazine defending the basic tenets of *San Jose Mercury News* journalist Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series exposing CIA complicity in Los Angeles' crack-cocaine epidemic. You focused in particular on the *NY Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *LA Times*' attempt to discredit Webb's story. Looking back, how many people do you think read and believed Webb's story? How effective was the corporate media's attempt to censor it?

**Norman:** I think quite a few people did read the series. I remember picking up the *SJMN* the day the first part of it came out and it was splashed right on the front page. I thought "this is not your garden variety corporate journalism in the daily paper". I would guess that because of its prominence in the *SJMN* and being circulated from there, certainly several hundred thousand people would have read at least one of the parts of the series.

In retrospect, the media systems that exist in this country were much more successful trashing Gary Webb's series than in "censoring" it per se. The extent to which major media outlets devoted appreciable resources and emphasis to denouncing Webb's work was really extraordinary. I think something close to a major media consensus emerged about Gary Webb's series. It emerged because previously there was some space.

I wrote a column very soon after the series was published, in which I said it was a very important series which seemed very solid. Soon after that there was some appreciable mainstream media coverage, which was not particularly negative. It was a mixture of media treatment and then of course there started to be a lot of radio talk shows, especially those with many black listeners. But the boom really got lowered. The *NY Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *LA Times* absolutely ended up really cutting the legs out from under that story.

**Hans:** Has there been anything in the media during the last couple of years that has talked about the series?

**Norman:** The particulars of Gary Webb's story are on the record. He has a book that came out a few years ago through Seven Stories Press. But the story has largely been left behind.

In terms of mass media, I remember sending an email to Gary Webb soon after the story broke. I wrote something like: "The bust of you is being prepared at the pantheon of Upton Sinclair, George Seldes, and Robert Parry. I was partly joking, but that is of course what happened. In any event, the conventional wisdom has been established that Webb got the story wrong.

I think the truth is much more that Gary Webb got the story

right. Maybe some of the packaging by the editors at the *SJMN* (headlines and so forth) was not as tight as it should have been. Webb pointed out that he was constrained by space. Even though it was a fairly large amount of space, he was forced by editors to reduce the length of the series in terms of the ground that he covered. This may have been a factor, but I think the fact that the CIA-backed Contras engaged in drug running is incontrovertible, and yet the news media on the whole decided that they didn't want to go there, with a few exceptions.

**Hans:** You've quoted the late *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham's 1988 statement to Senior CIA officials proclaiming her desire to help the CIA hide "dangerous" facts from the US public. Throughout their history, how has the CIA and the rest of the national security state worked to manipulate the US media?

**Norman:** Agencies like the CIA have functioned on several different levels. There's the overt manipulation: putting out disinformation stories, including what is referred to as "blowback", where they plant stories in the foreign press, which then blows back into US media. Officially the CIA is not supposed to directly manipulate the news media. In his book *Inside the Company*, Phillip Agee talks about that going on several decades ago in Latin America. CIA fabrication of stories throughout the world still goes on.

I think there are so many other ways which not just the CIA, but the Pentagon and the State Department and White House and so forth are able to truly manipulate the news. Part of it is background briefings, sometimes semi-"off the record" which point reporters in directions. There are a lot of friendships between top government officials and publishers and reporters.

In my review of Katharine Graham's Pulitzer Prize winning autobiography (the only negative one I've seen) that I did for *The Progressive*, I wrote about Robert Parry. He was a reporter at *Newsweek* and was told that a very tough and (as it turns out) accurate piece that he had prepared about the CIA role in Central America was put under extra scrutiny. There was some concern because Henry Kissinger was going to be Katharine Graham's houseguest that weekend, and subsequently the editors thought it should be toned down. In fact, Parry says it was toned down before it went to print. That is just one example of self-censorship and institutionalized spinning that goes on inside media outlets.

The net effect is that these government agencies get a lot of what they desire out of the media. They don't get everything. They certainly can't spike all of the stories they're trying to prevent. All in all, it's part of an ongoing process that is very favorable to the powers that be in Washington, and for that matter, on Wall Street.

**Hans:** In last December's issue of *Z Magazine*, you document extensive state censorship of information, even to the historically pro-US military, corporate media. One such example that you write about is the censoring of civilian satellite pictures of the post-bombing carnage. While the US media's coverage of the Vietnam War was certainly not truthful or anti-US military, television news was known for showing some graphic and often heart-wrenching footage from the battlefield. In this regard, it was different from today. When did this shift in US media coverage of US wars begin happening? What do you think are the motives for this?

**Norman:** I think the shift has been partly shaped by the political climate and the extent to which there is a strong anti-war movement functioning inside the United States. I was 13 when the Gulf

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### ...SOLOMON, from 13

of Tonkin resolution was passed in 1964, so I have a fairly good memory because I was pretty alert at the time of the media's coverage of the Vietnam War. It was really lousy for much of the war. As a matter of fact, during the first years of the war the media was terrible. They were suck ups to the Pentagon and the White House, and the State Department. The issues raised were largely tactical.

Early on there was not an emphasis on the carnage in human terms and I think you can make a strong argument that there was never a very good baseline of US media coverage of the war in Vietnam. Yes, there were some graphic photos, and certainly some of the coverage on television became grimmer and occasionally gruesome, and became not what the White House would have preferred. We're talking here the late 60s and early 70s, but the war really escalated savagely by 1965 and there was a media climate that had very little acceptance of dissent in the mid-1960s and anti-war protesters and critics were often vilified when they weren't being ignored.

Because of the anti-war movement and the horrific cumulative realities of the war in Indo-China, there was a shift in media coverage during the course of the Vietnam War. But, it's hard to imagine that the coverage that we got in 1971 could have been the cold start kind of coverage. That's not the default position of the US news media. I think in general when the flag goes up and the missiles start flying the reflex of the mass media is to close ranks around the war-makers in Washington. There have been some real changes and I think certainly more government restrictions have been imposed upon US media coverage in succession.

It was bad during the invasion of Panama in 1989. There were pools and it was very controlled. The Gulf War was even more controlled (having a pool system and so on). The coverage of the bombing of Afghanistan is even more controlled. There is very little that reporters seem to see or have access to in terms of the bombings that took place. They are always showing up (if at all) after the fact and have already written their stories on the basis of the stuff being spewed out from US government PR offices.

So, I believe that while US government restrictions and overt manipulations have been very important, there is also the key dynamic of self-censorship. The people with the power to make decisions in newsrooms across the United States overwhelmingly internalize the worldviews and outlooks of the people waging war at the Pentagon and their civilian superiors. With that sort of identification with the war makers, the major media outlets and the journalists that serve them are very ill positioned to engage in actual journalism. They're doing stenography for the powerful and when it comes to times of war, those are very blood-drenched, powerful institutions and individuals.

As we speak here in August, 2002, I just wrote a piece in the *LA Times* about the contrast between the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings on Iraq that occurred on July 31 and Aug. 1 (where the questions from Senators were not even softball questions—they were beach ball questions) and the SFRC during the Vietnam War under the chair of J. William Fulbright, with a key member being Wayne Morse, who is just a heroic figure. Morse

was vilified in the media, not so much because he warned that the war strategies would not be "successful", but much more profoundly, he argued on moral terms. He wasn't against it because it wasn't winnable, but because it wasn't moral. That again set it even farther outside the perimeters of mainstream media wisdom.

You can see that now in the Congress where even supposedly best members of congress like Senator Paul Wellstone can't find the voice to denounce preparations for a horrific war against Iraq. Media punditry and reporting is so overwhelmingly based on tactical debates. "How do we" instead of "whether or not" to wage the war, how it could be done effectively, rather than whether we as a country have any ethical basis for slaughtering people with an attack on Iraq.

**Hans:** MIT linguistics professor, anarchist, and anti-Vietnam War organizer Noam Chomsky often cites a poll taken where 70% of the US public thought that the Vietnam War was not a "mistake", but "fundamentally wrong and immoral". In light of the US media and military propaganda, what do you attribute this to?

**Norman:** Over a period of years, a strong anti-war movement developed in the US. Although disparaged often in the mainstream media, that movement with its many facets (most of them very positive) had huge effects on general public consciousness. So despite the role of the fourth estate (to an extent functional as a fourth branch of government during the Vietnam War), information flowed: first at a trickle and then gradually into a flood. It flowed from the grassroots.

Obviously there was no Internet then. Nobody had a computer during the 1960s unless they worked in some high-budget office somewhere. There were independent newspapers (what we called "underground" newspapers) and they were in literally hundreds of communities around the country. They had various outlets, such as *Liberation News Service*. They did this against great odds, and certainly with very little in advanced technology. I think the most advanced technology used at that time was the telex machine, which were very clunky and most of the underground newspapers didn't have them. *LNS* would send out packets of news, and people would gather news in their own communities. The circulation of the underground newspapers went into the millions every week. There were a few independent radio stations at the time, (like the stations owned by Pacifica or the few community outlets), or the underground papers, and magazines like *Ramparts*.

To me, as somebody who turned 18 in 1969, magazines like *The Progressive* and *Ramparts* were extremely important. I read my first anti-war articles in *The Progressive* and they happened to be written by people like Senator Frank Church and Senator George McGovern. I read *Ramparts* magazine and its photos and articles about the war in Vietnam were very important to me as they were to a lot of people. We went to rallies and demonstrations often with hundreds of thousands of people and we learned from them. The effect was that we had a parallel society appear, as information flowed as moral outrage grew and a critique developed. That critique made its way (albeit in diluted form) into mainstream media outlets, even into outlets like *Time* and

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*Newsweek*, the largest daily papers, and even onto television. Subsequently, the official line on the Vietnam War was challenged over a period of many years. There were contrary views of recent history, which took root.

However, I don't have a particularly rosy view how the public now perceives the Vietnam War. You're going to find a lot of people who don't have a clear understanding of the horrendous brutality of US policy towards Vietnam. Many really don't understand what was wrong with it and that it directly correlated with what's wrong with US society ongoing: the corporate power, the drive for profits, the lies from the government, the geopolitical efforts to dominate the planet, and the news media being dominated by Wall St. and Pennsylvania Ave. All those factors made the Vietnam War possible. Many people have a quite astute understanding, but a lot of people absolutely do not. That's not surprising because even with the strength of the anti-war movement at its peak, the mainstream media and the propaganda structures still have enormous impact and reach.

**Hans:** This past July you appeared on *CSPAN*'s "Washington Journal" news show. You've also appeared on *CNN*, *NPR*, *MSNBC*, and the *Fox News Channel*. When you've been on these mainstream news programs, do you feel that you were able to get your message out?

**Norman:** When I've appeared on the mainstream news outlets that you mentioned, they were almost always live broadcasts—which I always prefer. I felt that for those particular minutes, I was able to say pretty much what I wanted. I think that's good. At the same time I try to keep it in perspective. Just because there are cracks in the wall, doesn't mean that there isn't a wall. We should certainly utilize the cracks as much as possible, but still the wall exists and it acts as a constraint on wide ranging debate and the free flow of information.

Any advertising executive knows that the essence of propaganda is repetition. It is good that there are some progressive voices on TV networks and other major media outlets and we should strive to get more progressive voices onto more media outlets more often. But since the essence of propaganda is repetition, the occasional progressive voice in mainstream media doesn't fundamentally shift the media systems of the country away from serving corporate and militaristic power. I think that power continues to be maintained by and through institutions that are about maximizing profit rather than about democratic discourse.

**Hans:** What do you think is one of the biggest lies propagated by the US media in regards to the US military?

**Norman:** It's a tough question. It's hard to choose one or two, and we're talking about the grim, the damaging, the destructive aspects of public information flow, which is to say "disinformation" flow. One of the very worst examples of propaganda in this country is that we don't notice it. That there is constancy, scenery that is set up. The scenery is in place and it becomes the wallpaper of our world to a large extent.

My first biggest lie would be whitewashing the history of

the Vietnam War. I think once the Vietnam War was over, I think the notion that it was an aberration was a very muddling and destructive illusion. This relates back to what we were talking about earlier, that it was bad because it was a mistake, because it didn't turn out the way its architects had hoped: because it wasn't "won". That ambiguous overlay (which is a very damaging overlay) persists today.

On Aug 1, 2002, I was watching the *NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer on *PBS* and there was an interview with Joseph Biden, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Paraphrasing, he said "If we had hearings like this, which just concluded, early on in the Vietnam War, maybe we would have had better results". He didn't say what a better result would have meant. He's such a sycophant of the national security state and the military that even while he claims to be trying to analyze with integrity, he's not even willing at this point to acknowledge what the Vietnam war was: invasion and protracted slaughter by the US. So he simply left it hanging. He leaves it hanging because he can't make a forthright statement about the Vietnam War. I think this is very common still and very pervasive: that somehow it was bad because we couldn't win. What's implied is that if a few million people in Indochina had been slaughtered—as they were—but the US had ended up militarily triumphant, we would be just talking about what a wonderful war it was.

So this has the ripple effect on what has been called the "Vietnam Syndrome". Vietnam is a country where the death toll ran into the millions, where the poisoning with Agent Orange, Dioxin and other chemicals is still very real, where there are unexploded bombs—as is the case in Laos—, where the US hasn't bothered to cleanup where a quarter of a century ago Jimmy Carter said that the US did not need to make reparations because "the destruction was mutual". So when we talk now about the scenarios for present US military actions, we keep hearing the news media and the politicians say that they've "left behind the Vietnam Syndrome." They just got the wrong syndrome, because for them Vietnam was an abstraction, a poker chip in the big games that were being played.

The net result is an enormous pollution of the national discourse. The Vietnam Syndrome, unless we are delusional, has to be put in moral terms. The Syndrome has been defined by mass media and most politicians as "We have to go in with clear objectives. If you can't go in with clear objectives, don't do it. If you can go in with clear objectives that are achievable and the war is winnable, then you just give it everything you've got. Kill as many people as you need to do it and get what you want, then: God Bless America".

One of the tragedies we still need to work to mitigate and eliminate as best we can is the assumption that as long as the US can "win" a war, it's a good war.

When the first Bush said in 1990, that we weren't going to have a Vietnam experience, that was a war shot. At first, a lot of people mistakenly saw it as a more peaceful attitude. What Bush basically meant was: "We're going to win." That's one of the

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worst areas of lasting propaganda that are still with us.

**Hans:** Looking back at the US of the 60's and 70s reminds me of your essays documenting the corporate media's massive distortion of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s revolutionary politics of 1967 and 68. Almost entirely erased from our historic memory is King's militant declaration that white supremacy could never be abolished until both capitalism/poverty and militarism were also abolished.

**Norman:** The reasons that the last few years of his life have been largely obliterated (which the mass media of this country have so much to do with) are linked to his broadening recognition of the interplay between poverty, racism, and militarism. In terms of corporate capitalism, Dr. King was a declared dissident and opponent. He did not believe in the accumulation of wealth and the continuation of poverty. He was anti-imperial. He was denouncing what the news media in this country today hold as sacred: the simultaneous accumulation of wealth and the immiseration of large numbers of people from lack of basic resources that can bring adequate nutrition, housing, education, health care and so forth.

That's why he's largely been reduced to a martyr on a postage stamp. That's why he is most promoted in news media as someone who gave the "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. When I think about where we are now and all of the really difficult and often upsetting world events that are occurring, I think of what he spoke about at the end of his life: "POVERTY, RACISM, AND MILITARISM". The last 35 years only deepened the relevance of what he was saying in 1967 and 68. When I was just turning 17 I went to see the Resurrection City encampment (which was the last stop of the Poor People's Campaign) just a few weeks after Dr. King was assassinated. It's really quite disturbing to me that 1/3 of a century later, those issues of widespread poverty and racism, and huge expenditures for the military, are all with us and with us with a vengeance. To me it verifies and underscores the prophetic nature of his work, which also can encourage us today because as bad as things are, we have tremendous human resiliency that is manifested every day.

When I went to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre [Brazil] in early 2001, I was really thrilled to be around people from literally all over the planet who were organizing and fighting against what people there kept calling neo-liberalism: basically imperial corporate policies. In the depth of the despair that I shared with many people at the election of George W. Bush, I was really overwhelmed by being around the energy, vitality, and really optimism at the WSF. I think in that sense the perspective that Dr. King expressed with his words and his actions in the last years of his life is still very much alive and still should give us enormous resources for hope.

**Hans:** Is there anything else you would like to add for the interview?

**Norman:** Yes. Broadly defined, media work is really central to social change. We can benefit by paying attention to what works on an ongoing basis throughout the society. In other words, if we evaluate our successes by what's in the NY Times day to day, then we are making a big mistake. The right wing has at times been very successful because they believed in grassroots activity. Take for instance the Pat Robertson campaign in the late 1980s. The right wing fundamentalists did a hell of a lot of work at the grassroots: they networked, they burrowed into communities. Obviously I don't agree with their agenda, but the fact is that in some sort of perverse way they believed in grass roots community action much more than a lot of the liberal funders who spread some money around to liberal and leftist organizations —but

where the emphasis has so often been on high profile and expensive PR operations in New York or Washington oriented towards influencing elite opinion.

I have nothing against influencing elite opinion, but I think if you're going to make substantial social changes, you have to make substantial progressive movements at the grassroots. That's the only way you can sustain it. Otherwise you're at the mercy of these elite individuals and institutions that hold so much sway and power because they have the bucks and the huge influence.

We should renew our active engagement with social change in communities across the country. It's a false choice as to whether we are going to do national organizing or grassroots organizing. We have to do all of it. One without substantial energy with the other is really not going to sustain itself effectively over the long term. Not only is democracy not a spectator sport, it is not about getting the elite to like you. It's not about persuading elites because you can make them feel comfortable with you. Democracy is about challenging elites by organizing at the grassroots.

If democracy is going to come into being in this country (in a significant and far-reaching way) it needs to tear down the economic inequities that are making democracy in many respects impossible. That's obviously a huge task and it may often seem intangible but the struggle for wide-ranging media discourse is part of a broader effort. We sometimes wonder why progressives don't have more effective media institutions. My answer would be that that's because progressives don't have a stronger movement in the country as a whole. So we are facing the challenges of building progressive media institutions at the same time that we need to build progressive movements as a whole. To separate one from the other is just not going to pan out ∞



**NO MORE LIES:** Taking the struggle for democratic media to the streets, outside the FCC in Washington, DC.